

An Earith and Bluntisham Scrapbook 1897 to 1990

Facts, Features and (occasional) Fallacies
reported in Cambridge Newspapers

summarised by

Mike Petty

Many of these stories were featured in my ‘Looking Back’ column in the Cambridge News from 1996-2014. They are supplemented by some selections ‘From our Old Files’ published in the Cambridge Independent Press and other notes.

The complete ‘Cambridgeshire Scrapbooks’ of which this is a small section is published online at bit.ly/CambsCollection

I have digital and other copies of most of the stories summarised.
I hope to publish these online one day. If you would like them in the meantime then please get in touch.

The original volumes are housed in the Cambridgeshire Collection at Cambridge Central Library where there are many other indexes dating back to 1770.

They also have detailed newspaper cuttings files on over 750 topics that have been compiled since the 1960s.

Newspapers sometimes get things wrong. I copy things out incorrectly. Do check

There are a multitude of spelling and layout errors. Please forgive or correct them

News never stops but this file was finished on 31 August 2016.

I will maintain supplements and corrections – contact me for anything you need

Please make what use of these notes that you may. Kindly remember where they came from

See my website – www.mikepetty.org.uk for further notes.

Mike Petty, Stretham

2016

Earith & Bluntisham Scrapbook

1904 Oct 19

An inquiry was held at the Black Bull Inn, Earith on the death of a labourer. He lived at Over and had thirteen children but suffered from nervousness ever since he lost a son aged 21 by small-pox in London. He would often be muttering and talking to himself and sometimes took too much beer. He rambled about from village to village for eight or nine days at a time. A man who was fishing at Over Staunch saw his body on the bed of the river. It was brought to Earith on a plank in a boat and put in the outhouse where it was viewed by the jury. They returned a verdict 'Found drowned'

1945 06 29

Angling. — Cambridge Fish Preservation and Angling Society, renewing their match programme after a lapse of six seasons, had 34 entrants in their first competition at Earith Bridge on Sunday. All caught fish, and 11 competitors weighed in, the winners being; 1 A. Osborn, 3 lbs. 9 ozs.; 2 R. Parr, 1lb. 12 ozs. 14 dr.; 3 A. Argent 1lb. 4 ozs. 4 dr.; 4 H. Jeffrey. 15 ozs. The next match will be fished on July 22, also at Earith.

1947 Mar 27

Ready at a moments notice to help clear floods in the fens, 50 National Fire Service pumps are standing by in London awaiting the call from Cambridge. Up to midnight on Saturday last 600 pumps had been engaged for more than 3,000 pumping hours and 78 million gallons of water have been moved. Meanwhile fen river levels generally continued to drop today. The flow of flood water from the breach in the Ouse near Earith has been completely halted.

1954 Apr 13

The old Seven Holes Sluice at Earith which dates from 1824 will soon be demolished. Work has started on the new sluice bridge which will consist of three gates 22 feet wide with six feet piers separating them. The bridge, which will take about nine months to complete, will be 33 feet wide including roadway and sidewalks.

1954 Jun 18

An inquest was held on a London shipping clerk killed when the bridge of a motor cruiser he was piloting along the New Bedford River struck the underside of the bridge at Earith. He was in one of two boats hired from Banham's that had left from Denver Sluice. There was a high tide but the sluice keeper had said they would be able to get through to Earith that evening. The river was in flood and he might have made an error of judgement in estimating the clearance or failed to see beams under the bridge because of fading light. Dr Fairweather said he'd suffered from a depressed fracture of the skull.

1955 May 6

Firemen were called to Earith when fire broke out at the Boat inn. Its thatched roof was completely destroyed and the rest of the premises severely damaged. The licensee, Mr Darby, was away at the time and a passer by who saw smoke coming from the building gave the alarm. Villagers removed a large quantity of furniture. The thatched roofs of a group of nearby houses were ignited by flying sparks but firemen prevented serious damage to these buildings. The cause of the fire is not known

1966 04 29

Railway stations to be sold at Six Mile Bottom, Sutton (pic), Bluntisham, Haddenham, Harston, Wilburton, Stretham, Dullingham, Isleham, Longstanton – 66 04 29a

1966 10 11

Bluntisham station closed two years ago, is home t former porter-in-charge – 66 10 11a

1968 01 08

Tracked Hovercraft Ltd want workshops in Cambridge to develop 300 mph hovertrain at Earith – 68 01 08b, 68 01 24 # c.26.2

1971 06 01

Hovertrain – another 50-ton beam wheeled along the track at Earith – photo – 71 06 01

1971 08 04

Hovertrain arrives in Earith – photo near Abbotsley – 71 08 04

1971 11 02

Hovertrain positioned on track at Earith – photo – 71 11 02, 02a

1972 Jun 16

High-speed runs are to begin next week at Earith for the hovertrain being developed by Tracked Hovercraft Ltd, the Ditton Walk, Cambridge, division of the National Research and Development Corporation. A more powerful motor has been fitted after a three-week overhaul of the research vehicle which has been constantly used since its first run last December. It is planned to reach 110 m.p.h. - the diver of a high-powered sports car would be hard pressed to achieve the same speed. Work is going on to finish the two-mile extension of the track which will eventually be 12 miles long when speed of 300 miles an hour should be possible.

1972 Nov 17

The Government are considering the future of Tracked Hovercraft, the experimental air cushion transport project presently under test at Earith. Speculation has surrounded the project for some time. The work is well behind schedule. One major problem is the test track at Earith. At present this is little more than a mile long and the much vaunted 100 mph speed for the experimental vehicle RTV31, has not yet been reached. Early reports expected three miles of track to be completed last year and the full eight miles to be ready at the end of this year

1975 Jul 10

Britain's first & only tracked hovercraft made its last journey – by road. The 21 ton machine, code number RTV31, was trundled at a maximum 25 mph the 40 miles from its hangar at Earith to the College of Technology, Cranfield. It will join other transport "has-beens", including the remaining TSR2 aircraft, that suffered the same fate – axed by the Government as an economy measure when still in its early prototype days. The site & buildings at Earith have now been sold to a firm who plan to use it as a plant and stores depot

1976 Aug 20

The scheme to reverse the flow of the River Ouse from Ely to Huntingdon is likely to upset boat owners and people living near the river; there could be noise from pumps at locks, and smell in the tidal part of the river. The scheme, a bid to offset the impact of the drought crisis, will mean closing seven locks to navigation between Earith and Offord. If it goes according to plan about 30 million gallons of water a day will be pumped into Grafham Water.

1976 Sep 14

Although river flows have started to recover as a result of the weekend rainfall the Anglian Water Authority is sticking to its stand-by programme of controls in the Huntingdon and St Neots areas. But for the first time for many months it has been possible to pump water from the River Ouse into Grafham reservoir, which is an important source of water for the area. Director of Operations, Mr Geoffrey Bowyer said: "We need another six inches of rain fairly shortly to bring us back to anything like normal". The drought minister, Mr Denis Howell is to visit the area to inspect a focal point of the £200,000 reversal scheme at Earith.

1976 Sep 15

Two Government departments are severely criticised in a report from the all-party Science and Technology Select Committee of MPs, for errors of judgement which led to the cancellation of the Tracked Hovercraft project and the closure of Britain's only full-scale test track at Earith. Tracked Hovercraft Ltd was established by a Labour Government in 1967 to research the application of air cushion suspension and linear induction propulsion to high-speed ground transport systems. In 1973 it was wound up by the Conservatives after more than £5 million had been spent on the project.

1977 Feb 25

From 7 a.m. a business-minded man was to be found standing all day at Earith lock, poised to leap into action as cars spluttered to a halt in more than a foot of floodwater. The price for motorists who lost the gambol to get across the 150-yard section of waterlogged road was £1 for a push out and clean-up with a rag, £2 for a tow out with a Landrover. The 'get you out' service has been in regular operation for a number of years and is lucrative: "If they can't pay we'll take anything: watches, foreign currency, cheques", he said. By evening there was cut-throat competition from two enterprising schoolboys from Bluntisham; they had made £20 during the week.

1977 Apr 1

Anglian Water Authority-owned eel fisheries should be offered in lots of sufficient size to allow a proper commercial enterprise to operate, but this may force out traditional companies. Eel fishermen already have to be licensed in Cambridgeshire where there is a tradition of eel fishing around Earith and Littleport but many waters are worked "unofficially". Waters are becoming more over-fished every year; Dutch companies are keen to take as many eels as they can and smoked eel sells at £4 a lb in Holland. If one of the present fishermen paid for an official lease he might police it more thoroughly and offer more protection for the fishery.

1978 Mar 1

A unique village 'industry' may have dried up at Earith, and villagers are delighted. Winter flooding on the main road to Cambridge meant that people with tractors could sometimes make money by towing out stranded motorists whose cars stalled in the water. But now the County council has spent £23,000 on raising the level of the road by more than ten inches, and hope that this will keep at bay the waters of the River Ouse. Previously flooding had meant the road was blocked to cars for sometimes 15 days a year.

1978 Jun 1

Lives are at risk from rapid flooding because of the inadequacy of Cambridgeshire's archaic drainage system, a councillor claims. A key part of the system, Earith sluice gates, is governed by regulations made more than 150 years ago which prevent the operator from acting promptly to stop homes and fields being flooded. Recently farmers were so desperate they took the law into their own hands and cut through a flood bank to release millions of gallons of water which were threatening a village, farmland and cattle. The system was designed to cope with water that would soak through the land, but now things have changed with all the development along the A604 area

1979 Jan 31

The National Skating Association commemorated a hundred years of organised speed skating with a professional match at Bury Fen, Earith watched by 300 people. It was a Cambridge journalist, James Drake Digby, who set up the Association after he had covered the skating at Mepal during the great frost of 1878. He was so impressed by the achievements of the champion of the day, 'Fish' Smart of Welney that he determined to get rid of the cheating caused by heavy betting. He arranged a meeting in Cambridge Guildhall which led to the formation of the NSA with the Mayor as chairman and himself as secretary

Looking Back – Bluntisham
Compiled 20 Mar 2005

1897 22nd August

The subject of the interview in this week's "Cable" is Mr C.P. Tebbutt, who is a prominent member of the County Council, manager of Foster's Bank at St Ives, and farms about 550 acres of land, within a mile of Bluntisham railway station. On the question of education he is "very opposed to the pressure exercised by the Education Department in respect of keeping boys at school. I favour a half-time and a half-day system. I have been a manager of the British School in Bluntisham for many years and I am strongly impressed with the deleterious effect the compulsory classes have had upon the agricultural community. Boys who are kept in school until they are 14 years old never make the farm labourers they would have made if they had left school at an earlier period"

1900 30th August

Mr Walker, blacksmith, noticed that the thatched roof near the chimney of a house occupied by Bert Gentle, a journeyman carpenter, of Earith Road, Bluntisham, was on fire. The fire engine belonging to the village was accordingly manned and a wire despatched to St Ives for the engine and fire brigade. The Bluntisham engine, although an old-fashioned one, was placed in Mr Searle's farmyard and a constant volume of water was poured on to the farm buildings. Too much praise cannot be given to those who worked so indefatigably at the engine pump, for although the flames were driven by the wind to the adjoining thatched barn they succeeded in confining the conflagration to the house where it broke out. .

1928 Nov 28

The Isle of Ely County Council has taken over the road across Mepal Causeway as a main road but have no responsibility for a concrete viaduct. But, recognising the great delay and danger to the public when the road is flooded, they are prepared to find 25% of the cost. During floods last winter traffic was held up for three weeks; it was impossible to get a boat across and 40 workmen from Mepal had to walk eight miles after a day's work, travelling from Bluntisham to Sutton by rail. If the viaduct was built it would be one of the greatest improvements since the Council had been in existence

1974 10th October

If you're looking for home in the Cambridge or Huntingdon area there's really only one place to go. David Charles. Wherever you want to live and whatever you want to pay you are almost sure to find your perfect home. Orchard End, Bluntisham – around £12,500; all have four good-sized bedrooms, fitted kitchen and full gas-fired central heating. The Elms, Dry Drayton - 21 four-bedroomed luxury homes a mere 15 miles from Cambridge from £17 - £18,000. Lanes End, Hauxton offers you a host of good things like beautiful countryside, shops, schools, entertainment and very attractive homes at realistic prices – around £13,500 - Advert

1975 29th December

Living on a modern house on a St Ives estate just did not have enough character for Mr Peter Cracknell and his wife. So they have taken on the mammoth challenge of bring back to life a railway station at Bluntisham. Accommodation is not exactly tailor-made for a family at the moment. There is a booking hall, waiting room, a kitchen in a shed, a ticket office, three bedrooms, a yard and outbuildings. 'There aren't many houses with a platform at the bottom of the garden with a railway line as well. Most of our friends think we are crazy', he said.

1977 27th February

From 7 a.m. a business-minded man was to be found standing all day at Earith lock, poised to leap into action as cars spluttered to a halt in more than a foot of floodwater. The price for motorists who lost the gambol to get across the 150-yard section of waterlogged road was £1 for a push out and clean-up with a rag, £2 for a tow out with a Landrover. The 'get you out' service has been in regular operation for a number of years and is lucrative: "If they can't pay we'll take anything: watches, foreign currency, cheques", he said. By evening there was cut-throat competition from two enterprising schoolboys from Bluntisham; they had made £20 during the week.